10. SEEKING SUCCESS OF MIGRANT STUDENTS THROUGH DESIGNED TASKS

A Case Study with Albanian Students in Switzerland

INTRODUCTION

Revisiting School (Un)Success of Migrant Children

Some groups of minority students are well known for being at risk of school failure. Different trends of research in sociology, psychology and education have explored the processes that affect their school performances and careers. A bias of causal attribution, known in social psychology as "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1971), is likely to infiltrate these lines of research when researchers take for granted that being unsuccessful is "normal" for these groups and then start to look for causes that can explain this "obvious fact". The causal attribution is then made to individual (competencies, motivations, attitudes towards school and learning, involvement, cognitive and social skills, etc.) or group traits (family culture, differences between school and home, type of socialisation, values, etc.), as if characteristics of those who are failing were responsible for the failure, leaving out alternative explanations such as educational design, social prejudices, teachers' behaviour and other processes pertaining to the situation and its other actors.

Some studies have taken an opposite standpoint and have started to investigate the success of minority students, opening ways to better understand complex phenomena that cannot be reduced to quasi mechanical causal interactions between supposedly independent factors (Cesari Lusso, 2001; César, 2013; César & Kumpulainen, 2009; Hudicourt-Barnes, 2003; Mehmeti, 2013; Rosebery, Ogonowski, DiSchino, & Warren, 2013; Warren, Ballenger, Ogonowski, & Rosebery, 2001). These results have encouraged us to inquire further in two directions: (1) to better understand what are the pedagogical designs that favour success of the participants, (2) to reconsider more attentively the cognitive processes that are afforded or required by these pedagogical designs and (3) to better understand the communication dynamics between students and teachers. Indeed, there can also be a hidden attribution bias: students are failing on a cognitive task but the researcher looks for non-cognitive explanations for this failure (motivation, cultural differences, etc.). We would like here to remain centred on the cognitive and communication demands and their management by both students and teacher.

We will focus on a particular group of migrant children known particularly for their failure in school, i.e., Albanian-speaking children in Switzerland.

The Case of Albanian-Speaking Students in Switzerland

In the Swiss context, Albanian-speaking children are said to face difficulties in their social integration. Many negative social representations are conveyed by the media and through political discourse (e.g., Burri-Sharani, Efionayi-Mader, Hammer, Pecoraro, Soland, Tsaka, & Wyssmüller, 2010; Dahinden, 2009; Leuenberger & Maillard, 1999; Piguet, 2005), but also at school. Educational reports show that Albanian-speaking children are particularly inclined to school failure. Some studies (CDIP, 2003; Coradi Vellacott & Wolter, 2005; Kronig, Haeberlin, & Eckhart, 2000; Müller, 2001) suggest that the structure and functioning of the school system might be obstacles for these children's school success. Others point to teachers' negative representations due to a supposedly sociocultural distance between them and the children (Coradi Vellacott & Wolter, 2005). In this perspective, Klein, Nicolet and Grossen (2000) report how a Kosovar student's performances in mathematics were assessed as low by a Swiss teacher even though the researchers did not observe particular difficulties for this child. And Hauswirth and Roshier (1999) give the example of a Kosovar student who was considered a brilliant student in her country of origin but could hardly meet the school requirements and teachers' expectations in spite of the fact that she was demonstrating great involvement.

The general image depicts Albanian-speaking children in Switzerland as poor performers at school, apparently not able to display some important socio-cognitive skills. Our aim here is to go the distance with this general discourse and with the search for external factors to explain students' failure in order to observe what really happens in concrete cases around precise tasks: what are the cognitive and communicational processes behind students' performances in school?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This study will explore how these children, who are so often expected to fail at school, take part in a pedagogical activity that has been designed to foster argumentation and reasoning skills. The following questions will be addressed: (1) How do the children deal with the task: do they get involved and take active part in it? (2) Do they display important skills such as argumentation and complex reasoning? (3) How do teachers and students communicate?

A Pedagogical Activity Designed to Offer Interactive and Thinking Space

The activity was designed by the first author with the goal of promoting active involvement of all students and argumentation. It invites students to discuss a current issue of world importance. Students are considered as the main protagonists of the activity whereas the teacher is expected to intervene only when children need any help or when she needs to recall the instructions. Interactions among children are therefore preferred. As a guide for the activity, the teacher is supposed to provoke and foster argumentative discussions by requiring from the students that they share, confront and discuss their answers and to encourage the children to feel comfortable participating and to develop their own thinking. Following its design, this activity avoids the pressure of normative assessments that are well-known to inhibit children's competencies (Butera, Buchs, & Darnon, 2011).

A protocol describing the planned activity is given to the teachers. It contains four steps:

1. The teacher introduces the researcher: a friend who studies psychology and education and is interested in what children do during classroom activities. She will then explain that this lesson is different from usual lessons: children have to be active and play an important role conducting the discussion; and the teacher will be confined to a more passive role, helping with questions of vocabulary or other such matters.
2. The teacher then tells the students that she expects them to work first in dyads. She organises these dyads, and informs them that she will give two photographs (see Figure 1)[1] to each dyad. She then writes three questions on the blackboard:
   1. *What do you see in these pictures? Describe.*
   2. *Where could these two pictures have been taken?*
      2.1. *What are the characteristics of this country?*
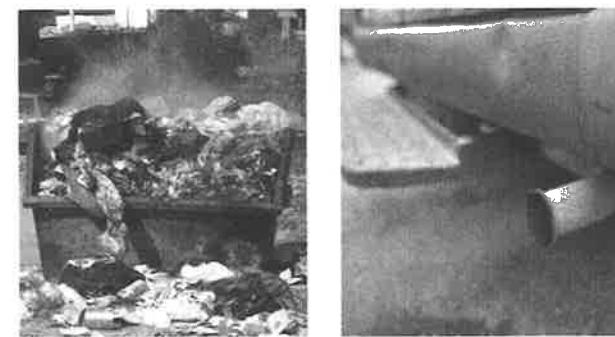   3. *What creates pollution?*

Figure 1. Photographs distributed by the teacher

She then tells the children that they have to discuss these questions in their dyad. When they have reached an agreement, they will have to write their answers on the blackboard. The dyads discuss the questions.
3. The teacher then asks the dyads to choose which member of the dyad will write the answers on the blackboard and then s/he does so. Once this is finished, the

teacher explains to them that they are now going to discuss one another's answers and that, for this, she will appoint one dyad to discuss the answers of another dyad. Dyads who discuss other dyads' answers are expected to ask questions if something is not clear, to show disagreement if they do not agree and to explain why.

4. The teacher draws attention to some of the answers written on the blackboard, and to some of the issues raised by the children, and opens the discussion to the whole class.

Participants and Collection of the Data

Two regular Swiss school teachers (the second one with Albanian as mother tongue) have volunteered to test this pedagogical design. Three classes were involved: a class of 8- to 9-year-old children (among which are a few Albanian speakers) during the regular school time; and two classes (one of 5- to 8-year-old students and one of 8- to 13-year-old students) of Albanian language and culture, organised by the local Albanian community and held by the second teacher in an official school building as an extra hour. Both teachers had received their training in Switzerland.

Our analysis is based on written notes taken during these lessons (we didn't want to use the video camera as it is very intrusive). Thanks to shorthand, some of the dialogues have been noted word for word.

In the three classrooms, the designed activity was a success and even more so than what we had expected: the teachers happily accepted the protocol and implemented it as it was; the students got readily involved and all of them (including the Albanian students of the regular classroom) displayed motivation to the point of neglecting the recess time in order to pursue the activity; they interacted a lot among themselves, respecting each other's points of view and spontaneously asking their peers to explain their standpoints.

In this chapter, we will "zoom" in on interactive moments in the class with the older Albanian children. We will first provide the reader with a view of these children's attitudes during the activity, of the answers they gave, and of their argumentative discussions. We will then consider in detail a specific moment of interaction between the teacher and three students that attracted our attention because it seemed particularly rich. The analysis will consist of a very fine grained analysis of their communication and argumentation, using the analytical model proposed by van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Snoeck Henkemans (2002).

A CASE STUDY

An Overview of Students' Involvement in the Task

We have observed that when the students received the two photographs, they spontaneously started to discuss in dyads, and this even before the teacher had a

chance to give the planned instructions. Obviously they were interested and felt concerned. All the dyads discussed the questions and came to conclusions.

When the students wrote their answers on the blackboard, we could see that answers to question 1 (*What do you see on these pictures? Describe*) were generally detailed descriptions of the pictures (*tailpipe, garbage, black smoke, gas, etc.*). When trying to answer question 2 (*Where could these two photographs have been taken? What are the characteristics of this place*), students mostly mentioned cities from either Kosovo or Albania. For question 3 (*What creates pollution?*), most of them mentioned poverty and citizens' lack of sensitivity to the issue of pollution.

We have also noticed that some students – even when not designated by the teacher as being in charge of discussing another dyad's answers – raised their hands and asked questions to their mates, such as: "why does carbonic gas create pollution?" Children then offered different answers such as: ozone layer, disappearance of water, global warming, etc., and then discussed the comparison between carbonic and natural gas.

During the discussions, we have observed that, even if a dyad simply agreed with the statements of another dyad, students would nevertheless tend to explicitly discuss others' answers and defend their own, backing them up with arguments. This finding, thanks to a very simple design of the pedagogical activity, was a nice surprise as it is often reported that argumentation can be difficult to foster in formal school situations.

These observations tend to show that the students really got involved in the activity, were active and started argumentative discussions.

An Interaction in Which Students Demonstrate That They Are Actively Using Argumentative Skills

An important aim of the designed task was to promote students' expression and offer them the opportunity to enter into argumentation. We are now going to "zoom" in on a specific moment in order to observe closely how this happens. This closer look will confirm the general impression of active and argumentative students, but we will see that the phenomenon is more complex: even when she tries, the teacher does not really support – at least in this case – the argumentative processes that she wants to promote.

For our analysis, we will partially refer to the analytical model of argumentation proposed by van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Snoeck Henkemans (2002) because it can help us to identify the students' standpoints, to observe if they confront their partners with their standpoints, and to see if they defend their standpoints with arguments. It also helps to trace the children's reasoning and see whether they are able to follow it till the end or eventually forget it if interrupted by their peers or teacher. Using this model to analyse the data also invites taking into account "unexpressed premises" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; Gerritsen, 2001; Greco Morasso, Miserez-Caperos, & Perret-Clermont, 2015). They are implicit

elements in the interlocutors' statements that can be reconstructed in regard to the context. We will also consider whether their standpoints are fixed or evolved during the social interactions.

Introduction of the Extract

The following extract is located in the third step of the activity (when all the students have written their answers on the blackboard and the teacher designates a dyad X to discuss the dyad of a group Y). Most students answered question 2 (*Where could these two pictures have been taken?*) by mentioning a city from Albania or Kosovo. But the dyad formed by Burim[2] and Arlind has written on the blackboard: "We don't know". When the teacher asks a dyad to comment on Burim and Arlind's answer, a discussion starts with Burim explaining his dyad's answers (turn 1), followed by the teacher asking a question (turn 2). Later (turn 6), two other students intervene, Valon and Shpresa, who were not necessarily in charge of discussing Burim and Arlind's answers.

Burim's Argumentation

Let's now reconstruct Burim's argumentation from turns 1 to 5. Unexpressed premises are written in parentheses.

Standpoint
1.   We don't know (where the two images could have been taken) (turn 1)

Arguments
1.1.1   Pollution is a current problem everywhere (on earth) (turn 1)
(1.1.1'a)   (Cities of Albania or Kosovo, among others, but not only, are on earth)
(1.1.1'b)   (Pollution is not exclusively in places where there are garbage and tailpipe)
(1.1.1'b'.1)   (Garbage and tailpipe are not the only sources of pollution)
(1.1.1'b'.1'.2) (Pollution is a problem present in Switzerland too (among other places) (turn 3))
1.1.1.1b.1.2.1a [in Switzerland] there are lot of companies and industries (turn 5)
1.1.1.1b.1.2.1b they produce a lot, this also pollutes (turn 5)

The reconstruction of Burim's argumentation makes clear that he starts by declaring a standpoint: "we don't know (where the two pictures could have been taken)" and that this is a standpoint that he immediately backs up with the argument that "pollution is a current problem everywhere". In turn 2, the teacher challenges Burim's argument when she asks: "And does it mean that in Switzerland too?". Burim answers in turn 3 with "yes", meaning that pollution is a problem present in

Table 1. Participants: Three students (Burim, Valon, Shpresa) and the teacher. Dialogues are in French because the teacher allowed the students to use the French language if they wanted to as they had declared that they lacked the proper vocabulary in Albanian to discuss pollution.

1	Burim	J'ai écrit «on ne sait pas» [à la question 2] mais pour dire que je ne suis pas d'accord avec les autres parce que [la pollution] c'est un problème qui est présent partout	I wrote "we don't know" [to question 2] but to say that I don't agree with the others because it [pollution] is a current problem everywhere
2	Teacher	Et ça veut dire qu'en Suisse aussi?	And does it mean that in Switzerland too?
3	Burim	Oui	Yes
4	Teacher	Ah oui, et où par exemple?	Oh yes, and where for example?
5	Burim	Ben j'ai déjà vu mais aussi parce qu'il y a plein de grandes entreprises et industries qui produisent des choses, ça aussi ça pollue	Well, I have already seen it but also because there are lot of companies and industries which produce things, this also pollutes
6	Valon	Oui mais quand même en Suisse y'a beaucoup moins parce que par exemple y'a pas ces déchets comme ca partout	But still in Switzerland there is much less because for example there is not so much garbage everywhere like that
7	Teacher	Et comment ça se fait?	And how does it come about?
8	Shpresa	Ben parce que la Suisse c'est pas un pays pauvre	Well because Switzerland is not a poor country
9	Teacher	Et donc?	So what?
10	Valon	On peut payer pour enlever les déchets	We can pay to remove garbage
11	Teacher	Où paye-t-on pour ça? comment ça se passe ?	Where do we pay for it? How does that work?
12	Burim	Les impôts	Taxes

Switzerland, too (see 1.1.1'b.1'2) and finally gives coordinative arguments (see for instance 1.1.1.1b.1.2.1a and 1.1.1.1b.1.2.1b) to sustain this. We can thus observe that Burim is able to answer and defend his standpoint and to deploy a rather complex argumentation.

This is relevant to point out in terms of the level of complexity in Burim's argumentation. A closer look at how we have deciphered his unexpressed premises allows us, moreover, to point out that Burim seems to reflect both on the place where the images could have been taken and on the sources of pollution (what creates pollution). This can indicate that he integrates question 3 (*what creates pollution*) in his reasoning and seeks a coherent sense of the questions asked.

As said, Burim's interventions are situated during the third step of the activity, when all the answers have been written on the blackboard and therefore exposed to the whole class. Thus, different standpoints have been exposed and discussed. Burim is most probably taking into account the other answers on the blackboard when he says that "[he doesn't] agree with the others". A possible interpretation of Burim's claim in turn 1 could be: "I wrote we don't know (standpoint) in order to say that I don't agree with the others (others think that pollution is specific to the cities of Albania or Kosovo), because it [pollution] is a problem current everywhere (and it is not only present – contrarily to what the photographs suggest – in the places where there are abandoned garbage and smoking tailpipes because these are not the only sources of pollution). If this reconstruction is correct, then it indicates that Burim is attentive to what has been said by his mates and that he does not want to directly attack someone else's answer – a sign of social competence. It could also indicate that Burim refuses to take the two photographs given by the teacher as representative of the phenomenon of pollution and moreover of the pollution in a specific place. On the contrary, his classmates seem to accept such premises. Burim's arguments show that he is considering both the place and the sources of pollution.

We can see that Burim keeps a line of reasoning in turns 1 to 5. It is also interesting to see that the teacher's challenge of Burim's standpoint (turn 2) does not make him abandon his standpoint. On the contrary, he maintains it.

Burim's expression of a standpoint that he supports with different arguments and that he maintains from turns 1 to 5, also when it is challenged by the teacher, invites us to think that the frame of the activity allows him to do so and that he feels secure enough in the activity to propose a standpoint and arguments unshared by his classmates.

Burim's argument, "pollution is a problem present in Switzerland too", seems to back up the standpoint "we don't know where the pictures could have been taken". The teacher, by her question in turn 2 ("and does it mean that in Switzerland too?"), seems to suggest a different standpoint than the one proposed by Burim. The new standpoint would be: pollution is not a problem present in Switzerland. Burim, however, rejects this standpoint, and it could be that this rejection indicates that he is still keeping to his own previous standpoint.

Valon's Argumentation

In this extract, we can observe another student who seeks actively to develop his standpoint: In turn 6, Valon counters Burim's argumentation on the industries in Switzerland that produce a lot and hence pollute; "But still in Switzerland there is much less because for example there is not so much garbage everywhere like that". As other students did, Valon previously mentioned a city in Kosovo as a place where these pictures could have been taken. Taking this into account, a possible reconstruction of Valon's argumentation would be the following (unexpressed premises in parenthesis):

Standpoint
1.   The two images could have been taken in a city of Kosovo
Arguments
(1.1)   (The two images represent a tailpipe and a container filled with garbage)
(1.1.1') (There are smoking tailpipes and containers filled with garbage in Kosovo)
1.2   The two images were probably not taken in Switzerland
1.2.1a   there is much less pollution in Switzerland [than in a city of Kosovo]
1.2.1b   for example [in Switzerland] there is not so much garbage everywhere like that (turn 6)

Valon is actively reasoning. He has a standpoint that he defends with arguments. While Burim proposed arguments that consider both the question of the place where the pictures could have been taken and the sources of pollution, Valon seems to be centred only on recognizing the place where the photographs could have been made. He seems to take for granted that the pictures are representative of a specific place, and he focuses on question 2 (*Where these two pictures could have been taken?*). Valon's intervention is particularly interesting because it could mean two things: he could be trying to state his standpoint and to confront Burim with it. It could also be that Valon wants to ensure that he and Burim are talking about the same object: indeed, Valon was probably very attentive to Burim's claim and could have noticed that he had mentioned other elements (industries) than those in the pictures. Anyhow, one thing is clear: Valon is involved in the activity, is trying to put his own thinking at play and is able to take the others' perspectives into account.

This second example again shows the student's involvement in the activity and both his cognitive and social competencies.

The Role of the Teacher

In this extract, what role does the teacher play in the interaction and how does it affect the students?

The teacher intervenes in many turns: In turn 2, she makes a suggestion ("Does it mean that in Switzerland too there is pollution?"); in turn 4, she invites Burim to give a precise example ("where for example?"). Then, in turns 6,7 and 9, she asks questions again about the students' claims. Her interventions seem to have different impacts. From turns 2 to 5, she invites Burim to deploy his thinking, but orients him on what she wants him to talk about. This does not directly stop Burim's course of reasoning. However, in turns 5 and 6, when a discussion begins between Burim and Valon, her intervention stops the discussion between the two students by giving authority to Valon's statement, in turn 7. Valon's statement becomes the new standpoint to be discussed (*there is not much pollution in Switzerland or pollution is not really present in Switzerland*). The students are then oriented towards this new

standpoint. Burim, who initially had a different standpoint, seems to play the game of entering into the discussion of this new standpoint and, in turn 12, contributes with a suggestion compatible with the statements made by his classmates.

In the designed activity, the teacher was expected to help the students to critically discuss each other's answers. In this extract her interventions do not seem to fit this aim. Indeed, in some turns she seems to interpret students' statements and takes a particular position on them (i.e., judges them). For example, in turn 6, Valon's intervention could be interpreted as a conversational skill: he wants to make sure that he and Burim are talking about the same object. But the teacher uses Valon's intervention to make her point. The teacher does not offer support for both students to mutually discuss their different views. Similarly, it is difficult to know whether Valon wanted to back up his standpoint with arguments such as the opposition between rich and poor countries, but the teacher, in turn 9, gives authority to Shpresa's argument ("Because Switzerland is not a poor country", turn 8) and hence guides him towards such a line of reasoning.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this case study was to offer children who are reputed to fail at school a pedagogical activity in which they would likely deploy their cognitive and social skills and in particular their argumentative competencies. We were happy to see that in conditions where they are explicitly invited to be active and develop their own thinking and confront their peers with it, these students showed great involvement, were active, and deployed argumentations that the analysis reveals as more complex than they could have seemed at first hand. They defend their standpoints and give arguments. The in-depth analysis of a particular interaction reveals that this happens in spite of the fact that the teacher intervened all the time, not always respecting the child's line of thinking, and as a consequence, did not leave much open space for the children to discuss among themselves their own different standpoints. The teacher had initially announced her intention to foster a discussion that would take place among the students, but she suddenly became the main interlocutor for each child.

Altogether these results can help shed light on the complexity of formal conversations in schools when children are supposed to develop their own reasoning and teachers have a hard time refraining from constantly intervening (for further examples of this type, see Giglio, 2015; Perret-Clermont & Giglio, in press). A closer look at children's answers in classroom dialogues can help to better understand the complexity of the task required from them: understanding the questions, the aim of the activity, the intent of the teacher in her interventions, reasoning, bringing arguments, but also their awareness of being in interactions with others who do not necessarily share the same standpoints, especially the teacher. While school performances tend to be assessed according to the "final response" expected by the teacher, this study suggests that children's capacities are likely to be underestimated

in this perspective because it does not grant them the possibility to use their different premises, to bring in new issues, and to receive attuned feedback from the teacher on what they are trying to say.

Beyond the case of Albanian-speaking children in these schools, we understand these observations as an invitation for further research to explore school success (or non-success) in migrant children. In this pedagogical activity, children have been invited to discuss a scientific and civic issue, namely pollution, and could draw on their personal knowledge and experience. They have been very explicitly allowed to express their own standpoints and even required to do so. Results suggest that they took this object of discussion very seriously. They were actively seeking to deal with the questions set by the teacher. They did reflect on the phenomenon of pollution. Not only were the children active in the discussion, but they also deployed rather complex argumentation (a result that is in line with the evidence of Greco Morasso, Miserez-Caperos, & Perret-Clermont, 2015; Perret-Clermont, Arcidiacono, Breux, Greco, & Miserez-Caperos, 2015) and this in spite of the fact that the teacher did not manage to see and hence to acknowledge the complexity of their argumentation.

We also feel encouraged to better understand how children's reasoning and argumentation are dialogical and not independent either from issues such as identity, previous experience, scope of the conversation, position management, etc. (Muller Mirza & Perret-Clermont, 2009; Sinclaire-Harding, Miserez, Arcidiacono, & Perret-Clermont, 2013).

Studies on the challenges of multicultural education (e.g., de Haan & Elbers, 2004; de Haan, Keizer, & Elbers, 2010; Gorgorio & Planas, 2005) have already raised many issues on why migrant children face important obstacles at school and have opened paths to avoid them. Our study suggests that children could also encounter difficulties not because of a potential cultural distance or discontinuity (de Haan & Elbers, 2004; Gorgorio & Planas, 2005) with the teacher (in the present case study they are all Albanian-speaking and here to advance their knowledge of their own language and culture) but because the teacher just seems to behave like many other teachers (e.g., observations of teachers in different countries by Giglio, 2015): confronted with a student's unexpected answer, she just (involuntarily) dismisses it by sticking to her own standpoint and intentions without making these explicit.

In educational contexts, there seems to be a tendency to attribute to the children (and to *their* supposed lack of competencies) their failure in school tasks. And this is so especially if they come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It is much less often the case that failure is attributed to the pedagogical design or to the teacher's pragmatic moves. In this case study, children did have the skills required by the assigned task, notably argumentative skills; however, the teacher was not able to capitalize on them because (certainly inadvertently) she rejected or stopped the children's actualisation of their argumentative reasoning. A better understanding by researchers and teachers of the conversational dynamics involved could probably help to advance quality and equity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1 The two images were found by the researcher on the internet:
Image 1: https://kasaselimi.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/mbetruina.jpg
Image 2: thinkstockphotos/stockbyte: http://cache4.asset-cache.net/xr/56530327.jpg?v=1&c=
IWSAsset&k=3&d=8A33AE939F2E01FF5442AB8FC2AF2ED849B62DCF13617E5E26F109DF6
8AEEBDABCC685C059D63657

2 All the names are pseudonyms.

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